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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SEA GAMES RELIGIOUS PAMPHLET INCIDENT FOLLOW-UP

REF: HCMC 001215

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. ConGenoffs met with Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang on December 11, 2003, to discuss the events of December 9-10 (reftel). Quang was also accompanied by the allegedly beaten religious worker. An agreement between Protestants and police had reportedly resulted in the release of all but two detainees, who were still dealing with bureaucratic issues. ConGenoffs also clarified details concerning numbers and the source of the "SEA Games" pamphlets. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) According to Pastor Quang, the U.S. student organization Campus Crusade for Christ funded the pamphlet production and coordinated the design with pastors in Vietnam, though he did not reveal which pastors. He originally stated that the pamphlets "showed up" at the houses of various Protestant leaders and that they decided to use them because "the content was good." At first, he denied knowledge of where the pamphlets were printed, but later said that they were printed by many sources in both Thailand and Vietnam. Plans called for about one million total pamphlets to be distributed. On December 10, however, police reportedly raided one printing house and seized 30,000 pamphlets. Quang was uncertain how many pamphlets have actually been printed and distributed. At the time of the incident, the religious worker who was allegedly beaten had a box of pamphlets on his motorbike. (Post Note: Other pastors who helped with the pamphlets told ConGen that Campus Crusade for Christ had no connection at all with the pamphlets and also said the number they originally planned to distribute was 300,000 not one million. End Note.)

3. (SBU) Pastor Quang claimed that the religious worker had been beaten and attacked with electric prods, as the church's December 10 press release stated. He initially said that the religious worker had bruises on his chest, arms, and back. When ConGenoffs asked the worker to show his bruises, however, Quang informed them that the Vietnamese police had "very advanced" techniques so that they could beat someone without leaving any marks and that the electric prods had been covered with rubber and cloth. The worker had a visible scratch on his face. He could not explain how it was caused, but said it happened during the altercation with police. He showed ConGenoffs two tiny scratches on his wrist that he claimed were from handcuffs. Finally, he removed part of his shirt and showed a small red abrasion on the inside of his upper arm. He claimed this was caused when he was grabbed by the police and tried to pull away, although he also mentioned being dragged along the street as he was being arrested. He showed no other visible marks and moved normally, without any apparent difficulties. Quang also patted the worker on the shoulders and back throughout the meeting without the worker showing any pain or discomfort. Quang stated that pictures had been taken of marks after the beating and distributed via e-mail, which Mission later received via a public information email address.

4. (SBU) Twenty "students" accompanied Pastor Quang to the police station on the evening of December 9, and twenty more "students" joined the "sit in" on December 10. According to Quang, the Protestants threatened both a hunger strike and a 3,000-10,000 person demonstration outside the HCMC People's Committee building unless police met three demands. Quang claimed the police at first asked them to please have a smaller group, maybe several hundred, not thousands. Quang outlined the conditions he had set. First, the police would investigate the incident, identify those responsible for "the attack," and have those individuals apologize. Second, police would release twenty Protestants "detained" over the previous three days for pamphlet-related offenses. Finally, the police would agree to "honor the security" of the Protestants as long as they were not violating any laws, and would follow proper procedure and not beat anyone if the Protestants were violating the law. Police and Protestant leaders signed a document outlining these points on the evening of December 10. The document did not require the police to admit any wrongdoing, beyond the promised investigation, or admit to detaining anyone. However, most of the alleged detainees were released that evening and the following morning.

5. (SBU) As of Pastor Quang's meeting with Congenoffs, only two alleged detainees had not reported in to family members. Quang speculated that those two were delayed because of administrative paperwork concerning the release of seized motorbikes, noting that the motorbikes might not be legally registered. He said that if those two were not released promptly, he and a few other select

Protestant leaders would go into hiding so that their followers would think they were still detained and proceed with the planned demonstration. The police also agreed to provide "protection," as long as no laws were being broken, if the pastors called 113, the Vietnamese equivalent of 911. Quang said that they had called once last evening when they believed they were being followed, and that the 113 police arrived as promised.

16. (SBU) Pastor Quang did not believe that his meeting with Poloff and DRL on December 9 was associated with the incident. His theory about why he was almost stopped immediately after his meeting was that the confusion of the SEA Games and the large crowds on the street provided plainclothes police officers with an easy opportunity. He indicated that he was watched and followed constantly, so the police always know how to find him. The religious worker said that one police officer told him that his beating and detention happened because of the pamphlets.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: While the meeting clarified some details, Post was unable to confirm some of the more extreme claims made in the email press release attributed to the Vietnamese Mennonite Church. Pastor Quang said he was not aware of the press release, but some of his followers may have put it together hurriedly for foreign dissemination. Post was able to obtain a copy of the agreement with the police, which appears to be genuine. It is harder to confirm any serious attempt on Pastor Quang's life by the police, a concern that Quang has voiced for the past several years without visible evidence. The religious worker did not appear to be seriously injured and seemed in very good shape for someone who had allegedly been "fiercely attacked by many police armed with rifles, pistols, and electric rods" or "badly tortured in detention" thirty-six hours before. He could well have been in a scuffle with police during his arrest, as at least some of his responses suggested, and may have been handled roughly during his detention. (This is also a frequent complaint even in cases not involving religious activities.) Quang did not indicate if the group intends to continue to distribute the pamphlets and risk more confrontations with the police.

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